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SUBJECT: (C) RUMORS RESURFACE ABOUT PREVAL'S HEALTH

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson, reason 1.5(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Port-au-Prince's chattering classes have again focused on the state of President Rene Preval's health after a series of events in which the President looked tired and worn. Preval, who traveled to Havana in December for a check-up (and apparently meetings with Castro and Chavez), is frequently rumored to have suffered a recurrence of the prostate cancer which afflicted him during his first term. Local diplomats, including our Canadian and Swiss colleagues, are speculating that his health is failing. More than one political pundit has the president with one foot in the grave.

¶2. (C) Preval scoffs at such reports (of which he is well aware.) In a conversation January 10, the president told me that he is feeling just fine and that his medical visit to Cuba went well. He acknowledged being tired by the recent round of late night meetings which led up to the selection of the Provisional Electoral Council and the compromise decision on the senatorial mandates. (reported septel.) He stated that his Cuban doctors found "nothing worrying" in his latest check-up and that he is "normal". Preval has brushed aside suggestions from his aides that he seek a second opinion in the U.S., noting he was spending too much time in the US at his dentist's as it was.

¶3. (C) Preval has stopped sharing information with his countrymen on his health as he did early last year, so Preval-watching has become a local sport. He is of course unlikely to be upfront with me on the state of his health, even in reponse to a direct question. However, I met with the president twice in the past week and attended his speech at the opening of parliament January 14 and saw no physical signs of ill health at this time. He maintains a fairly grueling schedule, often working long into the night. He has not visibly lost weight, nor is there any obvious indication that he is on pain medication. However, he is clearly tired and we are not in a position to assess whether that fatigue stems from a broader medical problem. Given his inability to delegate and his tendency to micromanage every aspect of Haitian government, it's hard to see Preval getting away from the job to recharge his batteries unless (or until) his health demands it. In the meantime, speculation will continue unabated about Preval's future -- and thus, Haiti's.
SANDERSON